

Assessing & Improving Program Quality

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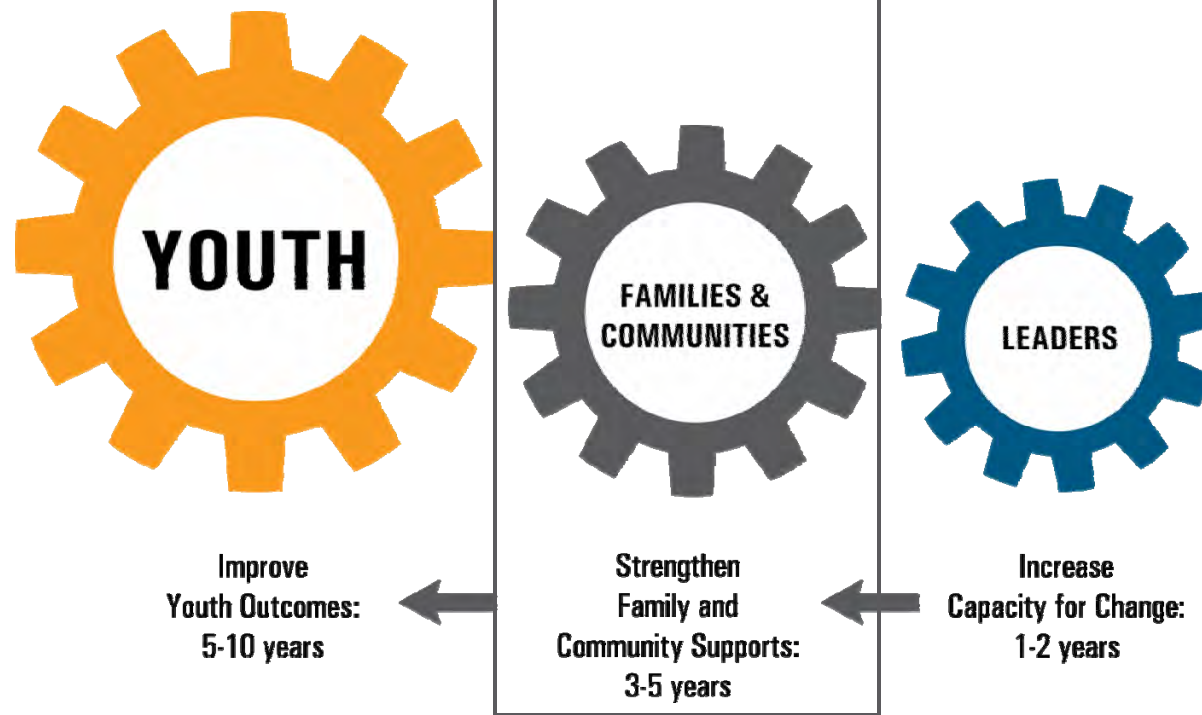
*Developing
Common
Measures of
Quality*

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Why focus on quality?

- Quality matters
- Quality is measureable
- Quality is malleable

Quality Matters



While improving **youth outcomes** is the goal we are all working toward, we believe that to get there at scale, our focus needs to be on helping **leaders** improve the **quality and reach** of programs and services available in the **community**.

Quality Matters

There is basic agreement that young people need structured, voluntary activities to fill their out-of-school hours.

- **The good news:** There is now strong evidence that these programs *can* produce positive change in things we all care about – academic achievement, social and emotional development.
- **The bad news:** Many programs do not.

Quality Matters

Why do only some programs make a difference?

Controlling for participation, young people who participate in **high quality** programs achieve greater gains than those who do not.

- In their 2007 meta-analysis, Durlak and Weissberg grouped 73 programs into 2 clusters. Programs with “SAFE” features showed positive effects on *almost every outcome* – school performance, social behavior, attitudes and beliefs. Programs that did not have the SAFE features showed *no effect on any outcome*.
- In the forthcoming YPQI Study, youth who participate in *higher quality activities* report higher levels of *interest, challenge, belonging, and learning*.

Quality Matters

Key Point:

Programs *can* improve outcomes by focusing on the quality of services.

Quality is Measurable

Lots of good news. We now have:

- Increased interest among researchers in better understanding OST settings.
- Momentum in terms of developing and refining “point-of-service” measures that can help capture data on the specific practices that drive youth outcomes.

And as a result:

- Reliable, valid tools for measuring the specific practices that differentiate effective and ineffective settings.

Quality is Measurable

- **Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT)**
National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the MA Department of Education
- **CORAL Observation Tool (CORAL)**
Public/Private Ventures
- **Out-of-School Time Observation Instrument (OST)**
Policy Studies Associates
- **Program Observation Tool (POT)**
National Afterschool Association
- **Program Quality Observation (PQO)**
Deborah Vandell and Kim Pierce
- **Promising Practices Rating Scale (PPRS)**
WI Center for Education Research and Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
- **Quality Assurance System (QAS)**
Foundations Inc.
- **Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA)**
New York State Afterschool Network
- **School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)**
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, UNC
- **Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)**
High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Measuring Youth Program
Quality
A Guide to Quality Assessment
Tools

Quality is Measurable

There is *a lot* of similarity across definitions. Common elements include:

- Relationships
- Environment
- Engagement
- Social Norms
- Skill Building Opportunities
- Routine/Structure

Quality is Measurable

There are more differences in how quality is *measured* than how it is *defined*.

- Data collection methods (type, target user, intensity)
- Types of measures (low vs. high inference, prescriptive vs. diagnostic)
- Rating scales (level of detail in rubrics)
- Technical properties (reliability, validity)

Quality is Malleable

Can these key aspects of quality be improved?

YES

Quality is Malleable

Components of effective quality improvement systems:

- Quality standards that address what should happen at the point of service
- Ongoing assessment of how well services compare to the standards
- Targeted plans for how to improve
- Training and technical assistance (including on-site coaching) that fits those plans

Quality is Malleable

Quality improvement **lessons learned**:

- Data, particularly observational data about their own practice, is a powerful motivator for staff
- Common language helps pave the way for change
- It is important to have standards *with* tangible supports
- Managers are a critical intervention target
- Bringing together data about participation, quality, and youth outcomes is ideal

Review

- Quality **matters**
- Quality is **measurable**
- Quality is **malleable**

but...in this economic climate, is quality **marketable?**

Quality is Marketable

Key ‘making the case’ messages:

- We are at a critical moment in our nation's history where we must increase the return on our investments and ensure our investments are aligned, efficient, and effective.
- While youth programs have the *potential* to impact important social, academic and emotional outcomes, the reality is that many do not.
- Investing in quality improvement is a way to protect and leverage investments in direct service. The additional cost quality assessment/improvement is small relative to the cost of service delivery, and essential to helping programs achieve the outcomes they aspire to.

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